Narrowing a Broad Topic

When you begin your research using a periodical database, often the list of results is overwhelmingly large.

Here are some options for reducing the size of your results list, while at the same time making it more likely that your found articles will be right on target.

Since many of our students find the Academic OneFile database to be so helpful, examples from it will be shown. However, all of the databases we provide will allow you to narrow a search.

This is the default search in Academic OneFile. Note that the setting is for a Keyword search, which looks at several descriptors of the content in the database. Changing your search to a Subject search might be better.

A search like the one above is sure to retrieve a very large amount of information.

Yes, 9289 academic journal articles are far too many to browse. To reduce the number, check the first two boxes to limit your results to those that are available as full-text, and also to those that have been peer-reviewed.

Now we have 1544 peer-reviewed, full text articles, considerably fewer than our first lists contained. But 1544 articles are still too many to review efficiently.

Depending on your topic, these steps may have narrowed your results to a manageable size. If not, there are more hints on the next page.
If your topic is very large, it may be helpful for you to see how it has been subdivided into smaller areas. From the main database page, click on the **Subject Guide Search** link.

Search for your topic, and limit your results to those that are available in full-text and those that are in peer-reviewed publications. Notice that there are also options to choose a particular journal or a range of dates.

Then, click on **Subdivisions** or **Related subjects**.

Now we see how our large topic has been divided into more specific subject areas. Just click on the subdivision that pertains to your project. Here, for example, we have 39 articles about **Cases** of child abuse.

We could also select another topic that is closely related to our original subject. You might find a term that is more pertinent in this list. In this case, perhaps **Child Sexual Abuse** is a better topic.

Still having problems? Please contact us—we are here to help!

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